

# JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Church at the Ball Park

Sunday, September 22

Rev. Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

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How about them Braves? They won their division again! Atlanta is filled with hope and excitement about the postseason!

I had the opportunity to attend two Braves games this week. Some of it was for work. Really? As I watched the game, I thought what if Christians were just as excited about worshipping the creator of the Universe as they were about attending a baseball game? After all, who do we think gave people the ability to create such a wonderful sport? Imagine if people showed up on Sunday mornings two hours early for a tailgate party before worship. And imagine if they left worship beeping their horns and shouting the name of Jesus! The world would be a different place!

Unfortunately, we know that is not usually the case. Instead, the attitude can be quite the opposite. There are often more complaints than cheers in the church. Can you imagine if Braves Manager Brian Snitker received the same complaints people have about coming to worship that we as pastors receive about people attending worship?

For example, what if Snitker received these common church complaints:

### **The Seats are Too Uncomfortable**

I am sure Snitker has never heard that one because cramped, uncomfortable seating doesn't stop scores of people from attending Braves games. The average attendance at a Braves game in 2019 was over 32,500. In 2019 over 2.5 million people have sat for 3 or 4 hours in the heat, some during the day, to watch a game. Many stand the whole game in the concession area! We only ask for an hour of your time for worship! Amazing, isn't it?

### **Every Time I Go to a Game They Ask for Money**

I am sure Snitker has never heard that one. People will gladly fork out lots of money for a Braves game. You want to know the average cost to attend a Braves game? \$75.00. And that price doesn't include beer or alcohol.

I was thinking that if every giver in this church increased their giving just 75 dollars a week we might not have to run a stewardship campaign again. We have the best news in the world, the most transforming message in the world, the most important work in the world! We should never complain about giving money to God to transform this world. If we are happy to spend tons of money on baseball and junk food, we should be ecstatic about spending money on the work of God and his church.

### **The People Sitting in My Row Didn't Seem Very Friendly**

Now we are a very friendly church. I don't think I have ever heard this complaint about JCUMC. But I have heard it in other churches.

My first response to this complaint is move! Move to a different row.

Second, some people come to church because they are hurting and they don't feel like talking. Some are shy and are intimidated. Others are introverted. It is rare for anyone in church to be rude to anyone. Be sensitive. You may be seated next to someone who is going through unimaginable suffering. Suffering is sometimes like an iceberg. What you see above the surface is nothing compared to what is going on below the surface. The question is, "Were you friendly to them?" If you want to have a friend, be a friend. Jesus said, "Be ye kind one to another." Remember the Golden Rule: "Treat people like you would want to be treated."

### **I Was Sitting with a Bunch of Hypocrites – You Could Tell They Weren't Real Baseball Fans**

You never hear that from baseball fans. In fact, baseball fans are all too eager to talk to folks who are new to baseball or don't know anything about it! What if Christians were the same way with those who are new to the faith? I wish Christians were just as excited about sharing their faith as baseball fans are about sharing their sport!

Besides, we are all hypocrites. The church is made up of imperfect people because, as the old saying goes, “The church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.” There is no such thing as the perfect church. If only perfect people were allowed in church, no one would be here! Saying that you are not coming to church because of all the hypocrites is like saying, “I am never going to that gym again because there was a bunch a fat people there!” What? Isn’t that the point? I often find people who are searching for the perfect church. My response is always the same: “There is no such thing as the perfect church. But if you find the perfect church and join it, it will not be perfect anymore!” They don’t like that. I don’t know why.

Why did Jesus come? Think about it. Jesus did not come for perfect people. He came for imperfect people. You don’t need a bath if you are clean. Jesus said he came to seek and save the lost – to bring healing and wholeness to broken people. The church is not perfect, but we know the one who is perfect and he is working in our lives. Last time I checked we need Jesus because we are imperfect people who need a Savior. Raise your hand if you would be lost without Jesus. Raise your hand if you are imperfect and need a Savior. That’s why we are here! We need the grace of God in Jesus Christ!

### **The Music was Too Loud and I Had Never Heard It Before**

In most sporting events the music is really loud. I love it though. When they’re blaring the AC/ DC I get all fired up. But I am sure not everyone loves it like I do. But can you imagine someone running up to a stadium manager and saying, “You need to change your selection of music. How about a little less ACDC and little more Lionel Richie?”

From time to time we get the complaint that the music at the 9:45 am service is too loud. I have two responses to that. One, go to the 8:45 or 11am service. That is why we have three worship services. Two, move to a different seat. The acoustics in this sanctuary are strange. Some locations are louder than others. You may say, “I don’t want to give up my seat.” Well, that is another sermon!

Sometimes people will leave anonymous notes of complaint about worship in our boxes or on our desks. Just so you know we don’t pay attention to unsigned complaints. If you don’t put your name on it, it goes right in the trash.

You will never please everyone. And if you try to please everyone, you end up pleasing no one. If we tried to appeal to everyone’s particular tastes we would drive ourselves mad.

So if the music is too loud, go to the 11am service or sit in a different seat. If the music is unfamiliar, give it time. You may end up liking it. After all, all of your favorite songs were once unfamiliar to you, right? I hated sweet potatoes the first time I tried them. Now I love them! You never know. Expand your horizons.

### **The Umpire Made a Decision I Didn’t Agree With**

Those umpires have it rough, don’t they? Imagine the role of an umpire. No one ever goes up to an umpire and says, “Thank you so much for doing such a great job at the game.”

But the great thing about being an umpire is that if someone complains too much they can say, “You’re outta here!” and kick them out of the game! Imagine if pastors could do that. “That’s enough out of you! You’re outta here!” I would not be in the ministry very long if I was allowed to do that!

The Church is not about you or me. Chances are you will not agree with everything decision our church makes. No one is going to be pleased all the time. But that is not our job. Our job is to please Jesus! To do what he is calling us to do. Sometimes that means doing things we don’t want to do or feel like doing.

I know sometimes a complaint will be legitimate. I’m not perfect. Share it in love and with a spirit to solve it. Be part of the solution, not the problem. Don’t spread it around. Paul said in Colossians 3, “Above all else put on the virtue of love. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.”

### **My Parents Took Me to Too Many Games When I Was a Kid**

I’ve never heard that complaint from a baseball fan. Have you? “I don’t want to go to the World Series. My parents took me to way too many baseball games as a child.” You never hear that. But I have certainly heard it from people about church.

To this one I say, “Get over it.” It is time to stop blaming our parents for everything. There is no such thing as functional family. All families are dysfunctional. And most parents do the best they can.

I am not insensitive to your bad experience with church. Maybe you grew up in a strict religious household and you went to church all the time. It was boring or cruel or terrible. I get that. But here is the thing: Go see a therapist. Process it and work it out. But don't blame the entire church and faith on your negative experiences. That's like saying you had a bad experience at the Publix up the road and you will never go to a grocery store again. Come on.

The good news is that Johns Creek UMC is a church which seeks out people who have had a bad experience of religion in their past. When they experience our church they reconnect to God and their faith. I know people who haven't been to church in 30 years connect with us. Now they can't wait to get to worship on Sundays. They experience God's love in action here and discover what the Christian faith is really all about.

### **I Read a Book about Baseball, and I Know More Than the Coaches Anyway**

The ministry is the most advised profession on the face of the earth. Not a month goes by when someone doesn't tell me how to do my job.

I once had a man come see me and he was angry about something. I don't remember what it was. He said, "You don't know anything. You have a lot to learn about running a church." I replied, "Well, I do have a Masters of Divinity and a Doctor of Ministry. I have been doing this for over 25 years. I think I know something about it." He replied, "I don't care about any of that. Just listen to me. You need to read this book. This will teach you all you need to know."

I said, "Thank you so much. What time do you get to work in the morning?" He said, "About 9am." I said, "Great! I will be there in the morning. You see, I read the book 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People' and I can tell you exactly how to do your job."

What if I walked into an operating room and said, "Excuse me Doctor. I read a book on surgery at the library. You are not doing this right. Give me the scalpel."

While I am always open for feedback and can always improve, there is a difference between constructive feedback and criticism. There is a right and wrong way to go about it. I am always open to a conversation. My door is always open. God called this pastoral team to

lead this church and I believe he has equipped us to do it.

### **The Games Are Scheduled On My Only Day to Sleep In and Run Errands**

Can you imagine? "I don't want to go to the baseball game. This is my day off!" You never hear that. People will go to a Braves game even if they are bleeding to death. Yet, we don't have time for or feel like praising the one who gave us everything?

It used to be that when people said they were active in a church it meant that they worshipped about every week. Now it means they come to worship every 4 to 6 weeks. For some it means worshipping every few months.

The Bible says to "Observe the Sabbath and the keep it holy." There is a reason for that. There is wisdom here. We need the Sabbath for rest, nourishment and for spiritual growth. Now I know some of you work on Sundays. I do too! Pick a different day. I take Mondays off for my Sabbath. I'm not very pastoral on Mondays. If you call me on Mondays, you get what you get.

Set aside time for worship and Sabbath each week. Sooner or later in life you will need to rely on your spiritual growth. If there is nothing to draw from you will wish you spent all those times sleeping in and running errands concentrating on your walk with God.

### **Some Games Go Into Extra Innings and I Am Late Getting Home**

I have never heard anyone complain about a game with extra innings. In fact, quite the opposite. When a game goes into extra innings, people will scream out, "Free baseball! Extra baseball!" When I go over time, I never hear anyone say, "Free sermon! Extra sermon!"

Will it kill you to listen to an extra minute of a sermon? Will it kill you to take a few minutes after worship and welcome those who have joined the church? I think that is a lot more important than getting to see the first pitch of a baseball game. And, by the way, God made a wonderful thing. It is called a DVR!

The bottom line of this message is this: We find time for what and who is most important to us. If something is a priority in our lives, we will move heaven and earth to be committed to it. The question is: Is worshipping God, growing in our faith and making disciples a priority for us? Are we keeping the main thing the main thing? Jesus

said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you as well." Amen.

*The list of complaints this sermon is based on was taken from a post on Face Book. I do not know the author. But they are good, aren't they?*



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